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Out of the Fog

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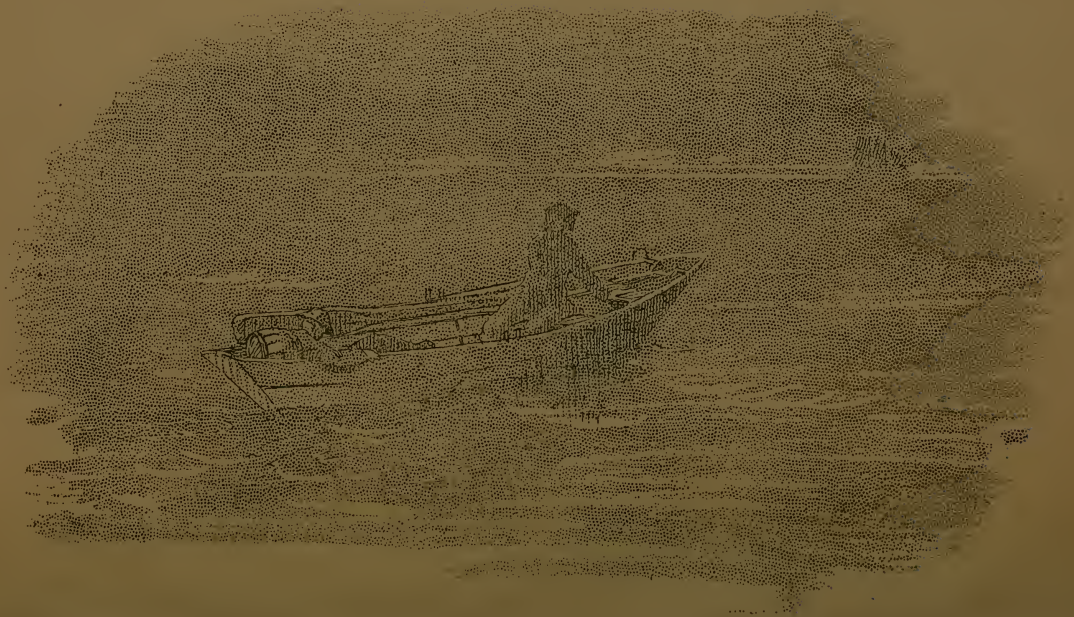

Out of the Fog

A Story of the Sea

C. K. OBER

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FOREWORD

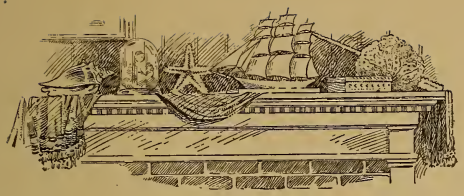
Since I am permitted to consider myself in some way responsible for this narrative's being put on record, it is with the very heartiest good will that I accept the publishers' kind invitation to write a brief foreword to it.

I have, during twenty years, been working against a problem that I recognized called for all—yes, and more, than—I had to give it. For I have been endeavoring, through my own imperfect attainments, to translate into undeniable language on the Labrador Coast, the message of God's personal fatherhood over and love for the humblest of His creatures. During these years, often of overwork, I have considered it worth while to lay aside time and energy and strength to improve the charting and pilot directions of our devious and sometimes dangerous waterways.

How much more gladly shall I naturally avail myself of any chance by

which to contribute to the knowledge of that seemingly ever evasive pathway leading to that which to me is the supreme motive power of human life—faith in the divine Redeemer and Master. The best helps to reach the haven we are in search of, over the unblazed trails of Labrador, are ever the tracks of those who have found the way before us. Just such to me is this simple and delightful story of Mr. Ober's. It has my most hearty prayers for its unprecedented circulation.

WILFRED T. GRENFELL.



Out of the Fog

OLD SALTS

The lure of the sea prevailed, and at nineteen I shipped for a four-months' fishing trip on the Newfoundland Banks. These banks are not the kind that slope toward some gentle stream where the weary fisherman can rest between bites, protected from the sun by the shade of an overhanging tree; they are thirty to forty fathoms beneath the surface of the Atlantic Ocean, a thousand miles out from the Massachusetts coast.

The life that had long appealed to my imagination now came in with a shock and a realism that was in part a disillusionment and in part an intense satisfaction of some of my primal instincts and

cravings. Old salts are more picturesque and companionable spinning yarns about the stove in a shoemaker's shop than they are when one is obliged to live, eat and sleep with them for four months in the crowded forecastle of a fishing schooner. An ocean storm is a sublime spectacle, witnessed from a position of safety on the land; but a storm on the ocean, experienced in its very vortex from the deck of a tiny fishing boat, is thrilling beyond description. "Ships that pass in the night" make interesting reading; but if they pass near you, in a foggy night, on the Banks, they are better than the muezzin of the Moslem in reminding a man that it is time to pray. I recall with vividness the scene on such a night, and still feel the compelling power of the panic in the voice of the mild-mannered old sea dog on anchor watch, as he yelled down the companionway, "All hands on deck." In six seconds we were all there; and there was the great hulk of a two-thousand-ton ship looming up out of the night. She had evidently sighted our

little craft just in time to change her course, and was passing us with not more than a hundred and fifty feet to spare. I can see them tonight, as they vanished into the fog—three men and a big Newfoundland dog, looking over the rail and down on us who, a moment before, were about to die.

Storm, fog, icebergs, cold, exposure, the alert and strenuous life, with his own life the forfeit of failure, are a part of the normal experience of a deep sea fisherman. Two members of our crew were father and son, Uncle Ike Patch and his son, Frank. The old man had been a fisherman in his youth, but had been on shore for thirty years. When we were making up our crew, Frank caught the fishing fever and wanted to go, and his father decided to go along with him. They were out in their dory, one foggy day, and when the boats came back to the vessel from hauling their trawls, Uncle Ike and Frank were missing. We rang the bell, fired our small cannon, shouted and sent boats out after them. As night

came on, we were huddled together in the forecastle, wondering about their fate, while the old fishermen told stories of the fog and its fearful toll of human life. It seemed a terrible thing for the old man and his boy to be out there, drifting no one knew where; and though we were accustomed to danger, there was a gloomy crew and little sleep on our schooner that night. In the morning the weather cleared and soon our missing boat came alongside; we received them as men alive from the dead. They had found shelter on another fishing vessel that happened to be lying at anchor not more than two or three miles away.

There was reason for our solicitude, for we knew very well that a large proportion of the men who get adrift in the fog are never found alive. Shortly before this experience we had spoken a Gloucester vessel and learned that her crew had picked up, a short time before, one of the boats of a Provincetown schooner that had been adrift four days. One of the two men was dead and the other insane. Each

day brought its own dangers, which the fishermen met as part of the day's work. thinking little of them when they were past, and ready for whatever another day might bring.

But four months is a long time to be out of sight of land, on a fresh fish and "salt hoss" diet, with molasses instead of sugar in your tea, and fresh water too much needed for drinking purposes to waste in personal ablutions. We all swore that we would never go to sea again; and when, after gliding into harbor in the night, we looked, one clear September morning, on the seemingly unnatural green of the grass and trees of the old North Shore, I said to myself, "This is God's country, if there ever was one, and I, for one, will never get out of sight of it again."

But I had tasted fog and brine, and the "landlubber's" lot was too monotonously tame for me. The next spring saw me on the deck of the same schooner headed for the Newfoundland Banks, the home of the codfish and the fog.

A seafaring ancestry and a boyhood spent within sound of the surf doubtless had much to do with my love of the salt water. My grandfather was one of six brothers who were sea captains, and our family had clung to the North Shore of Massachusetts Bay almost since the first white settler had moored his bark in that vicinity, more than two hundred years before.

My boyhood home was originally a fishing town, since changed to manufacturing, and was fragrant with traditions of the sea. Many of the neighborhood homes in which I visited as a boy had souvenirs of the ocean displayed on the mantelpiece or on the everlasting solitude of the parlor table. There were great conch shells that a boy could put to his ear and hear the surf roaring on the beaches from which they had been taken; articles made of sandalwood; curiously wrought things under glass; miniature pagodas; silk scarfs; bow-legged idols; and a wonderful model of the good ship Dolphin, or of some other

equally staunch craft, in which the bread-winner, father or son, had sailed on some eventful voyage. These had all been "brought from over sea," I was told, and this gave me the impression that "over sea" must be a very rich and interesting place.

But the souvenirs of the sea were not as interesting to me as its survivors. We had in our town, and especially in our end of it, which was called "the Cove," a choice assortment of old sea dogs who had sailed every sea, in every clime—had seen the world, in fact, and were not averse, under the stimulus of good listeners, to telling all they knew about it and sometimes a little more.

Scattered through the Cove were many little shoemakers' shops, into which, especially in the long winter evenings, these old salts would drift. There around the little cylinder stove, with its leather-chip fire, leaking a fragrance the memory of which makes me homesick as I write about it, they would swap their stories of

the sea, many of which had originally been based on fact.

These old derelicts—and some of the younger seafaring men—were better than dime novels to us boys, for we could always question them and draw out another story. Some of them were unconscious heroes who had often risked their lives for their comrades and the vessel owners; and for the support and comfort of their families no dangers or hardships had seemed too great to be undertaken or endured. We boys held these old salts in high esteem, and never forgot to give to each his appropriate title of "Captain" or "Skipper," as the case might be. We also occasionally had some fun with them.

We never thought of any of them as bad men, though some of them, by their own testimony, had lived wild and reckless lives. One or two, according to persistent rumor, had carried out cargoes of New England rum and brought back shiploads of "black ivory" from the West coast of Africa. Not a few of them were picturesquely profane. Old Skipper Tom

Old Salts Are More Picturesque and Companionable Spinning Yarns about the Stove in a Shoemaker's Shop than when One Is Obliged to Live, Eat and Sleep with Them.

Bowman had a very original oath, "tender-eyed Satan!" which he must have had copyrighted, as he was the only one that I ever heard use it. We boys would sometimes bait him, provoking him to exasperation, that we might hear it in all its original force and fervor.

We knew his habits well. He eked out a scanty sustenance by fishing off the shore and would frequently come in on the ebb tide and leave his boat half way up the beach, going home to dinner and returning when the flood tide had about reached his boat, to bring it up to its moorings.

So one day we dug a "honey pot" by the side of his boat, at the very spot where we knew he would approach it, covered it over with dry seaweed and about the time he was due we were lying out of sight, but within earshot, behind the rocks. He drifted down, at peace with all the world, went in over the tops of his rubber boots, and then, for one blissful moment, we had our reward.

Some of these old salts were so thor-

oughly salted, being drenched with the brine of many stormy voyages, that they kept in good condition well beyond their allotted time of three score years and ten. Some were of uncertain age, but were evidently well beyond the century mark, as proved by the aggregate time consumed on their many voyages, the stories of which they had reiterated with such convincing detail.

One of these, Captain Sam Morris, was patiently stalked by the boys through a long season of yarn spinning, careful tally being kept. When the tale was complete, the boys closed in on him.

"How old are you, Captain Sam?"

"Oh, I dunno, I ain't kep' count."

"Are you seventy?"

"I swan! I dunno."

"Well, you were on the Old Dove with Skipper Jimmie Stone, weren't you?"

"Sartin."

"You were on the Constitution, when she fought the Guerrière, weren't you?"

How could he deny it?

"Well, weren't you with Captain Lov-

ett on four of his three-year trading voyages to Australia and China?"

"Course I was."

"How about those trips 'round the Horn, on the clipper ship 'Mary Jane' from '49 to '55?"

"I was thar." They kept relentlessly on down the list, and then showed him the tally. Allowing for infancy, an abbreviated boyhood on land, and the time they had known him since he had quit the sea, he was one hundred and thirty-five years old. The showing did not disconcert him, however. He was interested, but he had told those stories so often and had come to believe each of them so implicitly that he could not doubt them in the aggregate. He simply exclaimed: "Well, I'll be darned! I feel like a young chap o' sixty."

But while some of these old sailors liked to "spin yarns" and some had their frailties, they were, as a rule, strong characters, rugged, honest, courageous, unselfish—real men, in fact, whose sterling qualities stood out in strong contrast

against the unreality of many timid and non-effective lives about them. It was not their romancing, but their reality, and the achieving power of their lives that appealed to me as a boy, and I was drawn to the kind of life that had helped to produce such men.

Then, too, the ocean itself, with its immensity, its mystery, its moods, the danger in it, and the man's work in mastering it, was almost irresistibly attractive to me.

On graduating from high school I declined my father's offer to send me to college, thinking that the life I had in view did not require a college education. Then he made me a very attractive business proposition, but it looked to me like slavery, and what I wanted most was freedom. My father and mother were both Christians, but I had become skeptical, profane and reckless of public opinion. I had left home for a boarding house in the same town at eighteen, and at nineteen I had slipped the moorings and was heading out to sea.

ADRIFT

My second trip to the Banks was made in response to the same kind of impulse as that which drives the nomad out of his winter quarters in the springtime or brings the wild geese back to their summer feeding grounds. To one who really loves the ocean, the return to it after a period of exile on the land, is an indescribable satisfaction. There was at least one of our crew who experienced this emotion as our staunch little craft turned her nose to the blue water, and with all sail set and lee rail almost under water, leaped away from the petty restrictions of the shore into the practically limitless expanse of the Atlantic. In a week we were on the fishing ground and sentiment gave way to business.

Our schooner was a trawler, equipped with six dories and a crew of fifteen, including the skipper, the cook, the boy and two men for each boat. Each trawl had a thousand hooks, a strong ground line

six thousand feet long, with a smaller line two and a half feet in length, with hook attached, at every fathom. These hooks were baited and the trawl was set each night. The six trawls stretched away from the vessel like the spokes from the hub of a wheel, the buoy marking the outer anchor of each trawl being over a mile away. I was captain of a dory this year, passing as a seasoned fisherman with my experience of the year before. My helper or "bow-man" was John Hogan, a young Irishman about my own age, red-headed, but green at the fishing business. John's mother kept a little oasis for thirsty neighbors, in a city adjacent to my home town, and his father was a man of unsteady habits. But John was a good fellow, active and willing, and, though he had not inherited a rugged constitution, he could pull a good steady stroke.

Soon after we reached the Banks, a storm swept our decks and nearly carried away our boats. As a result, the dories, particularly my own, were severely

strained and leaked badly. For two weeks, however, we had no fog, but on the morning of the second of June, just as we went over the schooner's side and shaped our course for our outer buoy, a bank of fog with an edge as perpendicular as the side of a house moved down on us like a great glacier, though much more rapidly, shutting us in and everything else out from sight. It was ugly and thick, as if all the fog factories from Grand Manan to Labrador had been working overtime for the two weeks before and had sent their whole output in one consignment. We had just passed our inner buoy when the fog struck us, but we kept on for the outer buoy, as was customary in foggy weather, since it was safer to get that and pull in toward the vessel, rather than take the inner buoy, pull out, and find ourselves with a boatload of fish and ugly weather over a mile from the vessel. We had our bearings, I had often found the buoy in the fog and believed that we could do it again. We kept on rowing and knew when we had rowed far enough,

though we had not counted the strokes; but we found nothing.

"Guess we have drifted too far to leeward; pull up to windward a little. That's strange, we must have passed it, this blamed fog is so thick. What's that over there?" We zigzagged back and forth for some time and then realized that we had missed it and must go back to the vessel and get our inner buoy. This seemed easy, but we found that it is as important to have a point of departure as it is to have a destination, and not knowing just where we were we could not head our boat to where the vessel was. We shouted, and listened, rowed this way and that way but not a sound came to us through the fog, although we knew that the boy must be at his post ringing the bell, so that the boats could hark their way back to the vessel. I learned afterward that the tide that morning was exceptionally strong. I had noted its direction and made allowance for it, before leaving the schooner, but we were where the Gulf Stream and the Arctic Current

are not very far apart and the resulting tides are strong and changeable. We were in the grip of two great elemental and relentless forces, the impenetrable fog, cutting off all our communications, and the strong ocean current sweeping us away into the uninhabited waste of waters. From my experience of the year before, I knew what it meant to be lost in the fog on the Banks, practically in mid-ocean; I understood that if the fog lasted for a week or ten days as it sometimes did, especially at that season of the year, it was a fight for our lives. I soon realized that we were lost and that the fight was on.

We were certainly stripped for it, without impedimenta, no anchor, compass, provisions, water, no means of catching fish or fowl, and with rather light clothing, as we were dressed for work and not for protection against cold. But youth is optimistic and claims what is coming to it, with a margin for luck, and we started on our new voyage of discovery with good courage and a cheerful disregard of

the hardships, dangers and possible death in the fog, with which and into which we were drifting.

It would not be strictly accurate to say that we saw nothing during all the time we were adrift, but the things we saw were of the same stuff that the fog was made of. Early in the first day I saw a sail dimly outlined in the misty air. I called John's attention to it with a shout, and he saw it too, but, as we rowed toward it, the sail retreated and then disappeared. We thought that this was strange, for the wind was not strong enough to take a vessel away from us faster than we could row, and we were near enough to make ourselves heard. Soon, the sail appeared again, and again we shouted and rowed toward it, and again it glided away from us and disappeared, and again, and again, through the seemingly endless procession of the slow-moving hours of that first day, we chased the phantom ship.

When night came on, there came with it a deepening sense of loneliness and

isolation. The night was also very cold, the chill penetrated our thin clothing, and we were compelled to row the boat to keep ourselves, not warm, but a little less cold. The icebergs coming down on the Arctic Current hold the season back, and early June on the Banks is much like April on the Massachusetts coast. We tried to sleep lying down in the bottom of the boat with our heads in a trawl tub, but we were stiff with cold, the boat leaked badly, and it was necessary to get up frequently and bail out the water. The thought also that we might drift within sight or sound of a vessel, or within sight of a trawl buoy, made us afraid to sleep.

The night finally wore away, the second day and night were like the first, the third like the first and second and the fourth day like another "cycle of Cathay." These four days and nights were like solitary confinement to the prisoner, the grim monotony and lack of incident contributing to the cumulative effect and accentuating the sense of helplessness and

isolation. There was nothing to relieve the situation. We were like an army lying in trenches in the face of the enemy, waiting for the enemy's move.

The fourth night we were startled by the sound of the fog horn of a sailing vessel. The wind was blowing almost a gale. We listened to get the direction, then sprang to the oars and rowed hard to intercept her, shouting, listening, rowing with all our strength, and willing, if need be, to be run down, in the chance of being seen and rescued. The horn finally sounded so near that it seemed that we could almost see the vessel, and we felt sure that they could hear our call. But our hearts sank as the sounds grew fainter and soon we were alone again with the wind and fog. The fifth day we heard the whistle of an ocean steamship. "We can surely head this one off," we thought, but she quickly passed us, too far away to see or hear. It was a bitter disappointment as this floating hotel, full of warmth, food, water, shelter and companionship, for the lack of each and all

of which we were perishing, rushed by, so near, yet unconscious and unheeding, in too great a hurry to stop and listen to our cry for help. I have thought of this since, as I have hurried along with the crowd in the street of a great city and wondered, if we stopped to listen, what cry might come to us out of the deep.

The fifth night the sea was running high. We were drifting with a trawl tub fastened to the "painter" as a drag to keep the boat headed to the wind, when it began to rain. I spread my oil jacket to catch the water, and we waited until we could collect enough for a drink, watching the drops eagerly, as we had tasted neither food nor water since leaving the vessel five days before. Just as we were about to drink, however, our boat shipped a sea, filling the oil jacket with salt water, and there was no more rain.

Every day we passed great flocks of sea fowl floating on the water, coming frequently almost within an oar's length, but always just out of reach. We were in worse condition than the Ancient

Mariner, with food as well as water everywhere about us, and not a morsel or a drop to eat or drink. Thirst is harder to endure than hunger, and yet hunger finally wakes up the wolf; and the time comes when even the thought of cannibalism can be entertained without horror. About this time John asked me, "Well, what do you think?"

"Oh," I said, "I think that one of us will come out of it all right."

He started, as if he thought that I had premature designs on him.

"You need not be afraid," I said, "I'll not take advantage of you."

He knew that I was the stronger and perhaps thought that if I felt as he did, his chances were very small.

The sixth day, John seemed like a man overwhelmed with the horror of a situation that had gotten beyond his control. He cowered at the opposite end of the boat and had said nothing for a long time. Finally he opened a conversation with a person of whose presence I had not been conscious.

"Jim," he said, "come, give me a piece."

"Jim who?" I asked. "Piece of what? Where is he?"

"Jim Woodbury," he answered, "don't you see him? There he is, hiding under that oil jacket. He's been there over half an hour, eating pie, and he won't give me any."

I tried to laugh him out of his delusion, but the thing was real to him. Soon he jumped up and said: "I'm going on board; I'm tired of staying out here."

"How will you get there?" I asked.

"Walk," he answered, "the water ain't deep," and he started to get overboard.

I caught him and pulled him back into the boat, not any too soon, for if he had gone overboard, the sharks would probably have gotten him, for they were not very far away. Every now and then I had seen their fins cutting the surface of the water, as they patrolled back and forth, waiting their time, or ours, as if they knew that it was only a question of time. Soon John started again to get overboard. This time I punished him so

severely that he did not try it again. After that, I had to keep my eye on him constantly. His ravings about food were not particularly soothing to my feelings, for I was as hungry as he, only not so demonstrative about it.

The seventh day drifted slowly by and the fog still held us captive. For a week we had had no food, no water, and scarcely any sleep; having our boots on continuously stopped the circulation in our feet with the same effect as if they had been frozen; we were chilled to the bone; my boat mate was insane. Since the whistle of the steamship had died away in the distance, two days before, no sound had come to us out of the fog but the voices of the wind and the swash of the waves. I knew the chart of the Banks and had a general idea as to where we were. There is a great barren tract on the Banks where few fish are found and fishermen seldom go, and we had drifted into this man-forsaken place. I had almost said "God-forsaken" too, but something began to shape itself in my mind

about that time, that makes it difficult for me now to say this. Rather, as I look back on our experience, I feel more like claiming fellowship with the "wanderer" who called the place of his hardship "Bethel" because it was there, at the end of self and of favoring conditions, that he found God.

THE PILOT

I was near "the end of my rope"—I was not frightened, or discouraged; my mind was perfectly clear; I was not stampeded. Of course, I had thought of God and of prayer, but I was a skeptic, as I supposed, and considered both not proven. But the steady contemplation of the probability of death, for seven successive days, under conditions that compelled candor, raised questions that skepticism could not answer, and gave to my questions answers that skepticism could not refute. There comes a time, under such conditions, when common sense asserts itself and sophistry fails to satisfy. Since I made this discovery in my personal experience, I have learned that my case was not peculiar, but in keeping with a general law in human experience, long understood and admirably stated in the 107th Psalm. Such words as these have come "out of the depths"

and it is sometimes necessary to go down into the depths to prove them to be true.

"They wandered .... in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses, and he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation..... Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High: therefore he brought down their heart with labor; they fell down and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder..... They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which

lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble . . . . they are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."

I had drifted into the "secret place," the door was shut, and it was the right time and place for me to pray. I saw that my life had been a failure, that I was absolutely worthless, and that, if death came then, there was not one good thing that I had ever done that would survive. In fact, I could think of nothing in my life that was worth remembering. I was not so much concerned about my own salvation as for another chance to live and to do an unselfish work in the world. And so I did what I thought then (and think still) was the only sane thing to do, I signaled for the Pilot.

That night the rain came. I spread my oil jacket and caught an abundance of water of which we drank deeply. With this refreshment came new hope and new courage for the final struggle, if safety could be gained that way. I reviewed the situation and considered one by one the possible courses we might take. We seemed to be shut in to three things. The first possibility was to row to land; but the nearest land, the Newfoundland coast, was nearly three hundred miles away, and I decided that we did not have the time or the strength to reach it. The second possibility was to be picked up by a passing vessel; but this did not look encouraging, for two had already passed us. The third and last hope was to find a fishing vessel at anchor, and within a reasonable distance. This last possibility seemed almost probable. But *how* probable? Possibly within ten miles, probably within twenty-five, certainly within *fifty*, some fishermen were plying their trade, but *where?* There are thirty-two points of the compass, and by deviat-

ing one point at the center, a distance of fifty miles would bring us ten miles out of the way at the circumference. We could row fifty miles, but we cannot take chances. Yet there is a snug little fishing craft out there on the rim of the circle, waiting for us to find her! But *which way* shall we go? I finally decided that this was a problem for the Pilot, and I left it with Him, satisfied that He understood His business and that if He had any orders for me, He knew how to communicate them.

The eighth day came, and with it came an impulse to row the boat in a certain direction. This impulse was not unlike the thousands that had come to me before. There was nothing about it to indicate that its source was any higher than my own imagination. If this was a voice from above the fog, it was certainly a still, small one. It was unheeded at first, not unrecognized. Reason said that to conserve our strength we should sit still and wait for the lifting of the fog. Fear whispered that if I obeyed the impulse,

we might be rowing directly away from safety. But the impulse persisted and prevailed.

"Get up, John," I said, "we have a day's work ahead of us. We are going to row off in this direction."

John responded automatically, fear acting in place of reason, but he was soon exhausted and lay down again. I kept on, however, resting now and then, and returning to the oars with the thought that fifty miles was a long distance and that we had a very small margin of time to our credit. Our course was with the wind, and nature worked with us all that eighth day and on into the night, as the pressure on me drove us toward our goal.

About the middle of the eighth night I realized that I had reached the limit of my fighting strength. John was in worse condition than I, for I still had hope, but my hope was not in myself. Then I talked the situation over with the Pilot. We had nowhere else to go; we had come as far as we could; our time was nearly up—what of the night? and what of the

morning? John was asleep; the world was a long way off: the sea and the mist seemed to have rolled over us and to have buried us ten thousand fathoms deep. But "out of the depths I cried," and I found the communication open.

Between midnight and dawn the fog lifted and from the overhanging clouds the rain fell gently through the remainder of the night. John lay in his end of the boat, but I sat watching. Finally, as if in response to some secret signal, the darkness began its inevitable retreat and, as the night horizon receded, out of the gray of the morning, growing more and more distinct as the shadows fell away, appeared a dark object less than two miles distant, nebulous at first, then unmistakable in its character. It was a solitary fishing vessel lying at anchor, toward which we had been rowing and drifting unerringly all through the night and the day before.

There it was! only a clumsy old fisherman, but it was the best thing in all the

world to us, and it was anchored and could not get away!

I do not recall the experience of any tumultuous emotion as this messenger of hope appeared on our horizon, but we knew that we were safe. How easy it is to write this simple word of four letters! but, to realize it, one must have a background of despair. Since that morning, the words "safe," "safety," "salvation," have always come to me freighted with reality.

It is doubtful if any of the vessel's crew had seen our boat, as it was scarcely daylight and such a small object lying close to the water would not be readily discernible. I had thought, a few hours before, that my strength was entirely exhausted, but the sight of the vessel called out a reserve sufficient for the final effort.

As I slowly brought our boat alongside, some of the crew were in evidence, getting ready for their day's work, and they seemed perplexed to account for our early morning call. But, when we

came close to the vessel, our emaciated appearance evidently told the main outlines of our story. They called to the others in a foreign tongue and the whole crew crowded to the rail. One strong fellow jumped into our boat and lifted John up while others reached down to help. Then, with their assistance, I tumbled on board, stiff with cold and with feet like stone. They gave us brandy and took us to the warm cabin where breakfast was being prepared and it is difficult to say which was more grateful, the smell of food or the warmth of the fire. John was put into the captain's bunk. It was a good exchange for he was not far from "Davy Jones' locker." We had been on board only a few hours when the fog rolled back again and continued for some time afterward.

The vessel was a French fishing brig from the island of St. Malo in the English Channel. None of the crew understood English and neither of us could speak French, but they understood the language of distress and kindness needs no inter-

preter. The captain showed me a calendar and pointed to the tenth of June, and when I pointed to the second he evidently found it hard to believe me, but John's condition helped to corroborate my statement. They let us eat as much as we wished, but nature protected us, for the process of eating was so painful at first that I felt like a sword swallower who had partaken too freely of his favorite dish.

Fortunately, also, our hosts were living the simple life. Their menu consisted chiefly of sliced bread over which had been poured the broth of fish cooked in water and light wine, the same fish cooked in oil as a second course, bread and hardtack, and an occasional dish of beans, which seemed to be regarded by them as a luxury. They had an abundance of beer and light wine and in the morning before going to haul their trawls, coffee was served with brandy. Cooking was done on a brick platform, or fireplace, in the cabin, and the captain, the mate and all hands sat around one large dish placed on the cabin floor and each helped himself

with his own spoon. A loaf of bread was passed around, each cutting off a slice with his own sheath knife. But notwithstanding simple food, frugal meals and primitive conditions, the hospitality was genuine and against the background of our recent hunger, thirst and general wretchedness, the place was heaven and our hosts were angels in thin disguise.

In about ten days we were brought into St. Pierre, the French fishing town on the small rocky island of Miquelon, off the Newfoundland coast, the depot of the French fishing fleet and the only remaining foothold for the French of the vast empire once held by them between the North Atlantic and the Mississippi Valley. The American consul took us in charge, sending us to a sailors' boarding house and giving each of us a change of clothing. In another week we were sent on by steamer to Halifax, consigned to the American consul at that port. There John's feet proved to be in such bad condition that it was necessary to send him to the hospital, and, as gangrene had set

in, a portion of each foot was amputated. He was "queer" for several weeks, but, with returning physical health, gradually recovered his mental equilibrium. After a few days in Halifax, I was sent on by steamer to Boston, bringing the first news of either our loss or our rescue.

On reaching my home town I did not go to a boarding house; there was plenty of room for me in the home and I was contented to stay there for a while. The old salts received me as a long-lost brother, and while the official notice was never handed me, I was made to feel that somewhere in their inner consciousness I had been elected a regular member of the Amalgamated Society of Sea Dogs, and was entitled to an inside seat, if I could find one, about the stove of any shoemaker's shop in the Cove. The Banks were revisited in memory, and all the old fog experiences were brought out, amplified and elongated as far as possible, but it was conceded that we had established a new record in the nautical traditions of the Cove. It took several years

for me to inch my way back to physical solvency from the effects of my exposure, and this delayed the carrying out of my plans, to which my fishing trips had been a prelude.

The strange thing that I now have to record is that I soon forgot, or willfully ignored, my whole experience of God, prayer and deliverance, and became apparently more skeptical and indifferent than before. The only way I can explain this is that I had not become a Christian, and my dominant mental attitude reasserted itself when danger was past. I practically never attended church. My position and influence, however, were not merely negative; I was positively antagonistic to Christianity, and this attitude continued up to the April following.

Dave Lived in a Beautiful Old Place Near the Shore and I Had Been in the Habit of Spending Many of My Sundays with Him.

But while I forgot, I was not forgotten. God had begun a work in me, the continuation and completion of which waited on my willingness to cooperate, and the most powerful force in the world, that of believing and persistent prayer, was being released in my behalf. My mother was a woman of remarkable Christian character, with rare qualities of mind and heart, knowledge and love of the Scriptures, and a deep and genuine prayer life. Notwithstanding my lack of sympathy with her in the things most fundamental, she had confidence that the tide would turn with me. Her confidence, however, was not based on me. She knew the Lord and understood that it was not the sheep that went out after the Shepherd who was lost until it found Him. So she kept a well-worn path to the place of prayer.

She was wise and said little to me on the subject, but I knew her life and what it was for which she was most deeply

solicitous. She had taught me from the Bible as a boy, and many a cold winter night, though weary with a day filled with household cares, she had come to my room and "tucked me in" with prayer.

My attitude toward Christianity in the winter following my second fishing trip on the Newfoundland Banks was different from that of the year before. Then I had been a skeptic, as I assumed, and declined responsibility for what to me was unknown and seemed to be unknowable. But, in the meantime, something had happened that had lifted this whole question with me from the realm of speculation to that of experience. The Pilot's response to my signal might, for the time, be ignored, but it could not be forgotten.

But, by deliberately putting aside my convictions of God, prayer and deliverance, treating them as if they had no existence in fact, I had introduced an element of distrust of my own mental processes. The will had taken the place of judgment, and the result was confusion; I was in the fog. I never attended

prayer meeting, but one Sunday night I was passing the chapel where such a meeting was being held. I had been there with my mother, as a boy, and while the meetings were "slow," they were pervaded with a true devotional spirit and a something real, though to me intangible and difficult to describe.

Whether I was influenced by the memory of these boyhood glimpses into the spiritual world, or by the spirit of the scoffer and the cynic possessing me at that time, or by the still small voice that had pointed the way to safety only a few months before, I never fully knew, but I went in.

The room was filled with people and a meeting was in progress, during which two men, old neighbors, whose lives I knew well, told the story of their recent conversion. One was Skipper Andrew Woodbury, a man of blameless life, but who had lived sixty-five years without religion. The other was my uncle by marriage, twenty years my senior, a close personal friend and familiarly called

"Dave." I had been in the habit of spending many of my Sundays with him, as he was a non-church goer, companionable, genuine and open-hearted as the day. It was evident that he had found something that he wanted to share with his friends, and while I made light of it at the time, his testimony made a profound impression on me.

Toward the close of the meeting the leader gave the invitation to those "who want to become Christians" to rise. No one stood up. Then he came within closer range and invited those "who would like to become Christians," but still no one responded. I was becoming interested and was almost disappointed when no one answered to this second invitation. Then he put up the proposition to those "who *have no objections* to becoming Christians." "He will get a lot of them on this call," I said to myself, but to my surprise, no one stirred. "Well," I thought, "this is too bad, but why couldn't I help him out? I have no objections to becoming a Christian," and

I stood up. I slipped out of the meeting ahead of the crowd, but in my room that night before I went to bed, I found myself on my knees, trying to pray. I did not succeed very well. "Oh, what's the use?" I said, "there's nothing in it." But I lay awake far into the night, thinking, feeling the beating of my heart, wondering what kept it going and "what if it should stop suddenly?"

But in less than a day these impressions had passed. I laughed them off and kept on in my own way. For six weeks I steered clear of Dave, but I did not want to lose his friendship, and then, too, I was rather curious to find out what, if anything, he had really discovered. So, one Sunday morning in early April, I drifted down to his home, as I had done so many times before. I stopped at my father's house on the way, and after a short visit, went on to Dave's. It was a pleasant morning, and I left my overcoat at home, as I had but a short distance to go.

Dave lived in a beautiful old farmhouse

near the shore, overlooking the harbor, and our Sunday program had been walking along the beach, or sitting around the house smoking, eating apples, drinking cider and killing time in the most unconventional way possible. "It's too bad," I thought, "that Dave has got religion, it spoils all our good times"; but I was hoping to find him less strenuous on the subject than when I had heard him in the chapel six weeks before. But Dave's conversion was so genuine and his enthusiasm so real that it was impossible for me entirely to resist and beat back the impact of his testimony.

I concealed my impressions, however, and told him that no doubt he needed it, it was probably a good thing for him, I wouldn't say a word to discourage him, but as for me, I did not need that kind of medicine. He urged me to go to church with him, but I declined his invitation so positively that he did not renew it. "I'll walk along with you as far as the corner," I said, but when we came to the point of parting an impulse came to

me to go with him. "Walk slow, Dave," I said, "I'll go in and get my coat and go to church with you." We were both surprised, he, because he had given up all hope of my going with him, and I, because ten seconds before I had no thought of going. I have often thought of it since, and never without a sense of profound thankfulness for the impulse that came to me that bright Sunday morning, at the parting of the ways.

I went with Dave to church that morning, came back and spent the afternoon with him and went with him again to the evening service, after which I remained for personal conversation. Dave had exhausted his ammunition, but the man who talked with me had been practicing the Christian life for twenty-five years and was a man of fine personality, culture and business experience. He knew the Gospel and also knew human nature, and mine in particular, while I knew that he was genuine.

"Charlie," he said, "don't you think it is time for you to be a Christian?"

"No," I answered, "I can't be a hypocrite; I can't pretend to believe what I don't believe."

"What is there that you can't believe?"

"Well, there is the Bible, for instance."

"Don't you believe the Bible?"

"About as I believe Robinson Crusoe."

"Do you think the trouble is with the Bible, or with yourself? Don't you think that, if you had faith, as a Christian man, the Bible would be a different book to you?"

"That looks easy; of course, if I had faith I would be just as you are. But how can a man believe what he does not believe?"

"Did you ever hear about prayer?"

"Yes, I have heard something about it."

"Don't you think that there is something in it?"

"Yes, I am inclined to think there is." (I could not honestly deny it in the light of my experience.)

"Well, don't you think that if you were

to pray to God for faith, God would give it to you?"

This question touched the spring of memory, and conscience showed me what it thought of me. I was ashamed of my littleness and of my unscientific attitude of mind in willfully ignoring the greatest facts of my experience, and I was also ashamed of my ingratitude. And so, in an unguarded moment, that is, in a moment when my will was off its guard and my judgment asserted its right to be heard, I gave my answer to the question and the answer was, "Yes, I believe that He would."

And then came the question, "Won't you do it?" This question precipitated the fight of my life. I do not remember how long my friend waited for my answer, but judging from the struggle in my mind, it must have been a long time. What would it mean for me to answer this question in the affirmative? First, it would mean the sacrifice of my independence; next, it would mean fellowship with a lot of so-called Chris-

tians, whose Christianity was not of a manly type; third, it would mean a step in the dark, and this seemed to me to be unreasonable. On the other hand, it might mean the winning of something better than that which I called independence; it might also mean fellowship with the really great characters of the Christian Church, and these men had always appeared very attractive to me. With this last thought came the question, How did these men live the victorious life? and it was clear to me that they lived it by faith. Then came the thought, How did they begin to have faith? and it seemed to me that this step in the dark, which I hesitated to take, was probably the very step by which these great men had passed from a life of unbelief to their victory of faith.

This last thought came as a revelation. It had always seemed to me that faith was an experience of the emotions or a satisfying of the intellect, and that one might *obtain* faith by the *initiative of the will* was a new idea to me. If this was

true, the step in the dark was not unreasonable but scientific and psychological. I was certainly in the dark then. It could be no darker if I went forward in the path to which my friend invited me. I decided therefore to take the step and to pray for faith, hoping that in the process I should find a Christian experience. And so I answered, "Yes, I'll do it."

My friend prayed with me and then I prayed, but all that I could say was "Lord, show me the way." I was not conscious of any special interest, I had simply willed to pray and wanted to believe. I had won the fight with myself, however, to the extent of getting the consent of my will to pray and to trust, but I realized that the battle with myself was only begun and I knew also that I had another fight ahead of me, or a series of them, with the conditions that hemmed me in and seemed to make the Christian life impracticable.

One of these adverse conditions was my relations with the men in my boarding house. How could I go back and

tell them that I had decided to do the thing that I had ridiculed and scoffed at in their presence? Of course this was pure cowardice; I was afraid of their ridicule. But the break was made easier for me than I feared it would be. I found on entering the smoking room of the boarding house, that "Uncle Dick Moss," a rank spiritualist, had the floor. He was on his high horse and was charging up and down the room in the midst of a bitter and blatant Ingersollian tirade against Christianity and the Bible. The crowd was cheering him on. The day before, this probably would have amused me and I might have followed him, supporting his arguments, or rather assertions—there were no arguments.

But during the twelve hours that had just passed I had been facing realities and Uncle Dick's exhibition disgusted me. So when he had quieted down, I decided that it was time for me to run up my colors. If the break had to come, it had better come then. "Uncle Dick," I said, "you have been talking about

something that you don't know anything about. Here you are swallowing spiritualism, hook, bob and sinker, and having trouble with the Bible and the only religion that can do the business that we need to have done. The trouble with you is that you are afraid that the Bible will upset your spiritualism, and you don't dare to investigate the Bible and stand by the result of your investigation. I'm tired of this whole business, and I have made up my mind to investigate the Bible and, if it is what I think it is, to try to live by it. I am going to be a Christian."

A shout and a laugh went up. I was called "Deacon," and it was suggested that I lead in prayer or at least make a few remarks. But I had said enough to put myself on record and it was hardly to be expected that they would take me seriously on such short notice. When it came time to go to bed I felt that in order not to be misunderstood I must pray in the presence of my roommate. He was a cynic and a nothingarian and I felt sure

that he would neither understand nor appreciate it. It was hard to bring it about, as he kept on talking in a way that seemed to give me no opportunity to turn the subject naturally. I was tempted to let it pass, but felt that, if I did, it would be fatal to my new-formed purpose. So finally, in almost an agony of awkwardness, I blurted out, "Jim, I don't care what you think about it, I'm going to pray." Jim proved to be entirely mild and agreeable about it, however, and gave me his blessing in a patronizing sort of a way. The next day I burned my bridges behind me by packing my trunk and going home.

Up to this time I was conscious of nothing unusual. What things had taken place I had done myself and it had been entirely within my own option and power to do or not to do them. I had received the testimony of at least four witnesses of the fact of conversion and the reality of the Christian life; I had relaxed the opposition of my will and given my judgment a chance to act; I had taken

advice from experience; I had prayed; I had turned my face toward the Christian life; I had cut loose from conditions unfriendly to Christian experience, and I was trying to be a Christian. But I was still in the fog.

For the next three days I worked very hard trying to be a Christian. I attended a meeting each night, rose for prayer, prayed, did everything I was told to do, and as much more as I could think of. The burden of my prayer and of my requests for prayer was that I might have faith. I wanted to get something that I thought every Christian had, or must have in order to be a Christian, and so far as I knew, I was willing to pay the price. But nothing resulted, except the natural weariness from my own exertions. I was still in the fog.

The fifth day was "Fast Day," a good old New England institution, with a prayer meeting in the morning, which I attended and at which I rose for prayer. In the afternoon was a union service, with a civic or semi-religious topic, but

I attended it, as I did not want anything to get by me that might contribute to the solution of my problem. There was scarcely anything about the service that was calculated to make a spiritual impression. The address was poor, as also was the music. I tried to follow the argument, but finally gave it up and began to think about that which had been uppermost in my mind for the five days past. The thing baffled me; the object of my quest had eluded my every effort to grasp it. The experience of the five days was new, but it contained nothing but that which could be accounted for by purely natural causes. I reviewed the whole period to see if I had left out any essential part of the formula. Was it possible that my skepticism had been well founded, that there was nothing in the so-called "Christian experience" after all? It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the fifth day since I had set my face toward the Christian life and I was still in the fog.

But I was weary with the effort, and as

I thought it over, I said to myself, "What are you trying to do?" and the answer was, "I am trying to be a Christian." Then it dawned upon me that *trying* was not *trusting;* that, if I succeeded in my effort, I should have only a self-made product and not the religion of the Bible, and that it was unreasonable for me to expect the results of faith before exercising faith itself. I was stumbling at the very simplicity of faith. I was working to win what God was waiting to give, while my latent faculty of faith, the greatest asset in personality, was lying worthless through disuse. I thought of my experience on the ocean, when finally, helpless to help myself, I had left my whole problem with the Pilot and He had taken command and brought us through to safety, and so I deliberately gave up the struggle and said to myself, "It is right for me to serve God and to live for Him, and I will do it whether I have what they call an 'experience' or not." And, having settled the question, I dismissed it and waited for instructions.

It Came as Quietly as the Daylight Comes When the Night is Done.

And then something happened, for, from without, surprising me with its presence, like the discovery of a welcome but unexpected guest, there came into my life a deep, great, overflowing peace. I had never known it before, and therefore I could not by any possibility have imagined it; but I recognized it as something from God. It was not sensational, it came quietly; as quietly "as the daylight comes when the night is done." It was not emotional, unless it was in itself an emotion. But emotions are transient and this had come to stay.

With the peace, there came also something that seemed to be a reinforcement of my life principle, an achieving power, a disposition to dare and an ability to do that which hitherto had seemed impossible; and the petty pessimism of the past gave way before this new consciousness.

With this deep incoming tide of peace and power came a clearing of the mental atmosphere, and I saw that the fog had lifted. When I saw this, I said to myself quietly, "I think I am a Christian,"

and almost immediately added, "I *am* a Christian!"

The fog had passed, and the drifting was over; I had come within sight of land. What land it was I did not then know, but it proved to be a new world. How great it is I do not yet fully understand, but I have been exploring it thirty years and I think it is a continent.

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